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SYMPOSIUM ON GEOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS

A. G. Doskach and K. V. Dolgopolov

In its 1948 session, the Geographic Faculty of Moscow University undertook the task of evolving a "cooperative theoretical development of the most difficult geographic problems." The session was devoted to the memory of the Russian geographer, D. N. Anuchin. The material of the session was published in Symposium No 9, "Geographic Problems." The editors-in-chief of this symposium were K. K. Markov and A. I. Solov'yev.

The symposium contains a number of articles devoted to the history of Russian geographic science, the history of the formation and origin of evolutionary ideas in geography, and articles and statements dealing with problems in contemporary geographic science.

The authors of the symposium, particularly Yu. G. Saushkin, succeeded in showing the enormous contribution which Russian geographers made to science and how necessary it is for the Soviet people to study and become familiar with their scientific heritage.

The party and government has set an unexcelled example in the correct use of the USSR's scientific heritage in their historic decree of 20 October 1948 concerning the plan for transforming nature. The session of the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences imeni Lenin (VASKhNIL) had shown how Soviet biologists must creatively develop Darwinism and follow the path of I. V. Michurin and T. D. Lysenko. This session provided impetus for a discussion of the fundamental theoretical problems in all branches of Soviet science and to further development of theory from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism.

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Though the editors state that the geographers of Moscow University upheld the correct principles in working out an advanced theory for the development of the geographic medium, careful familiarization with the material of the symposium will convince the reader that, along with the interesting and valuable data, the symposium unfortunately contains many serious errors of a methodological nature.

In the foreword to the symposium, its editors-in-chief announce: "In geography, as in biology, two viewpoints exist: the Soviet, based upon the process of self-development of the geographic medium, and the bourgeois, which considers that the geographic medium develops mainly under the action of external impulses, under the action of changes in the force of solar radiation."

Further, in N. A. Solntsev's article we find an explanation of the principles and sources of the idea of self-development of the geographic medium (the landscape) from the standpoint of the authors of the symposium: "In considering the pre-Dokuchayev period, the appearance toward the end of the last century of one more idea, extremely important for our study of the geographic landscape, namely the idea of self-development, stands out. Its creator was the great Russian geobotanist Academician S. I. Korzhinskiy." And further, "The idea of self-development, advanced by Korzhinskiy, did not win firm support immediately. It has obtained universal recognition only in our time. However, even Dokuchayev took note of it and attempted to use it in his soil studies."

S. D. Muraveyskiy also concurs: "The viewpoint which assumes that 'the moving forces' in the development of all natural processes on the earth may be found only on the earth and seen in the self-development of these processes is quite legitimate." He contrasts this viewpoint with the ideas of A. A. Grigor'yev, who acknowledges that the forces connected with the development of the solar system, primarily solar heat, may, along with the factors of terrestrial derivation, greatly influence the development of the geographic medium.

We may conclude the following from the authors' statements:

1. Soviet landscape studies are based on the idea of self-development of the geographic medium advanced by S. I. Korzhinskiy and adopted only in our times.
2. The incorrect bourgeois representations of the geographic medium consider that the geographic medium develops mainly under the action of the forces of solar radiation, while the correct Soviet representations state that the geographic medium "develops itself" mainly without the action of "external impulses," namely, changes in the force of solar radiation.

Neither of these propositions postulated by the authors can be acknowledged correct or competent.

The doctrine of development in its most complete and profound form was created by Marx and Engels and then brilliantly developed by Lenin and Stalin.

S. I. Korzhinskiy had no consideration for this doctrine. Being a talented and accurate observer of nature, and having contributed much to the study of history of the development of the vegetation of our country and the nature of the steppes, he in several of his works stated elemental dialectical viewpoints on the development of separate objects in nature, but this is a far cry from the creation of ideas which would impregnate Soviet geographic science and become, as the authors stated, an idea core for it.

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It is necessary to define the term "self-development." This term is sometimes used in contemporary Marxist literature to emphasize, in contrast to metaphysical ideas on development, that the development of objects and phenomena is not simply the result of continuous external actions upon them, but must be studied simultaneously both from the standpoint of "the natural motion inherent in life" and from the interaction with the surrounding medium.

Korzhinskiy defined development and self-development in a completely different way. In his scientific world outlook, he was a vitalist, a follower of the English anti-Darwinist Betson, one of the founders and creators of the present-day bourgeois doctrine of heredity. Korzhinskiy made development, the evolution of the organic world, dependent upon "the fundamental internal property of organisms, independent of external conditions," i.e., upon the unique tendency to change which is eternally inherent in organisms.

The authors and editors do not discuss the fact that the earth is a part of the solar system, with which it is in constant contact and deep interaction. They, therefore, discuss the geographic medium as a certain autonomous "self-developing" system, free from the influence of "external" conditions and not interacting with the "external medium" of which it actually is a part.

This concept was most clearly expressed in S. D. Muraveyskiy's article. "The developmental process of the organic world," writes S. D. Muraveyskiy, "is governed by special rules which are inherent to it alone. The existence of a certain organism in a certain biocenosis is determined not so much by its conditions of existence at the given moment as by the fact that this existence is a compulsory stage in the phylogenesis or ontogenesis of the form." We find essentially the same thought in a slightly different form on the next page: "The intensity of natural processes, in particular the speed of chemical and biological reactions, depends mainly upon the nature of the substance, its characteristics, and only secondarily depends upon the external conditions which change the intensity in comparatively narrow limits."

T. D. Lysenko's statements should have prevented the authors of the symposium from adopting the idea of the independence of the organism or the landscape from the external medium. It must unfortunately be acknowledged that the VASKhNIL session did not properly influence the ideas of the symposium's authors.

The authors distinguished Soviet and bourgeois geography by their attitude toward the influence of solar radiation as an external factor upon the development of the geographic medium. The attitude toward the role of external and internal factors in the development of the geographic medium is a very important characteristic of the methodological setup of any geographical school. However, it is impossible to agree with the statement that the gap existing between Soviet and bourgeois geography is measured only by the difference in their attitude toward solar radiation.

Bourgeois geography formulated its theoretical positions very clearly in the person of Gettner and his followers and predecessors--Kant, Ritter, Chizhov, etc. The basis of the scientific-philosophical world outlook of Gettner and his followers is the metaphysical separation of matter, time, and space. Geography, according to Gettner, is a science which studies objects and phenomena only in their spatial connection. The necessity for studying geographic objects simultaneously in their development (in time) was either directly or indirectly negated by Gettner and his school. Geography, from this standpoint, is a descriptive science whose fundamental objectives are countries, landscapes, and parts of the earth's surface "in their different structure." General geography consists then only of comparative regional studies, a science of the earth's surface in its local variations. The problem of the geographic

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medium as a single developing system, of landscapes (regions) as natural units which are part of the medium, and of the laws of development of the geographic medium and geographic landscapes are strange and superfluous to bourgeois geographic science.

As we see, the particular problem of the "main" or "supplementary" influence of solar radiation upon the development of the geographic medium is not the basic problem separating Soviet and bourgeois science. The basic problem is that from the standpoint of Soviet geographers there actually exist (1) a geographic medium as a contradictorily developing (in time and space) material system, and (2) geographic landscapes as natural parts of this developing system, while bourgeois geographers do not recognize the concept of the geographic medium as a complete developing system and do not acknowledge the study of the laws of development of the geographic medium and geographic landscapes to be problems of geographic science.

The confusion of the authors' ideas with regard to bourgeois geography was naturally expressed in their evaluation of this geography. Thus, N. A. Solntsev noted "a deposit of superficiality" and "confusion and scholasticism" in foreign geography and stated that the purposes and tasks of this science were far from clear.

While there is no doubt that there is much confusion and scholasticism in foreign geography, it is just as impossible to reduce the entire difference between Soviet and bourgeois geography to their different evaluation of the influence of solar radiation and the whole subject content of Soviet physical geography to Korzhinskiy's vitalistic "idea of self-development" as it is to note only a deposit of superficiality and unclearness of purposes and tasks in evaluating bourgeois geography.

The confusion and scholasticism of bourgeois geography is a consequence of their idealistic methodology and methods of masking perfectly clear tasks and definite purposes. We must remember that the basic purpose of bourgeois geography is to explain the social inequality of natural conditions, to justify imperialistic grabs and the enslavement and exploitation of other peoples, and to serve as the basis for geopolitics and the repartition of the world.

Such a liberal evaluation of bourgeois science is all the more wrong in that it is given by the authors in a period when the struggle between the forces of democracy and reaction is aggravated in a period when Anglo-American imperialism is attempting to start a new war and establish its world domination.

It is natural that the authors' basically incorrect concept concerning the laws of the development of the geographic medium and landscapes would lead them to limited conclusions when they spoke of complete utilization and transformation of the landscape in the interest of constructing a Communist society in our country. N. A. Solntsev introduced what he thinks is a new concept, i.e., "the natural potential of a landscape," meaning "those latent natural possibilities which are present in each landscape but which cannot be realized without the aid of man." But the point is not merely in the realization of the latent and clear potentialities of each landscape; we must try to transform nature and to change and increase the natural riches of the country. This problem, outlined by Stalin, is already being solved by the Soviet people, but it extends far beyond the confines of simply realizing the natural possibilities of a landscape; we are concerned with a basic change in the properties and character of the landscape. In order to force the landscape to develop in the direction necessary, we need a fundamental knowledge of the laws of development of the geographic medium and the geographic landscape as a part of it and a correct understanding of the interaction of external and internal factors in the development of the landscape to be transformed.

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There are many other incorrect principles in the other articles. Thus, for example, the authors of the symposium consider the development of geographic science in our country to be a single and continuous process, lacking any sort of inner contradiction and struggle and not undergoing changes as a result of the Great October Socialist Revolution. The articles in the symposium offer no indications of the recent basic struggle of progressive Russian geographers against the attempted penetration of idealistic ideas into Russian geography. Thus, A. I. Solov'yev in his article stated that "D. N. Anuchin was far from capturing that direction and that methodology of general geography developed by A. Gettner in Germany"; actually, Anuchin tried to refute Gettner's idealistic principles. In his article, "The Historical Method in Physical Geography," K. K. Markov attempts to elevate the commonplace geographer Ye. Chizhov to the highest rank of "Russian theorists in classification of sciences." In evaluating the ideas of this idealist, Markov limits himself to noting that "Chizov's principles in determining the content of geographical science have not been upheld."

In Yu. Brotskiy's review of Academician A. A. Grigor'yev's "The Progress of Soviet Physical Geography for 30 Years," we find a denial of the struggle against the penetration of idealistic concepts into Russian geography. Brotskiy charges Grigor'yev with "distorting historical fact" because Grigor'yev openly pointed out (in his works of 1932 - 1946) the penetration of idealistic viewpoints into Russian geography. "Analysis of geographical literature and the activity of Russian geographers in the pre-Revolutionary years," write Brotskiy in rebuttal, "clearly proves that Russian geography has developed the theoretical positions advanced by V. V. Dokuchayev and D. N. Anuchin." While it is impossible to underestimate the enormous importance and the guiding influence that the ideas of Dokuchayev and Anuchin had in developing Russian geography, it is also impossible to deny the fact that idealistic tendencies penetrated the works of several important Russian scientists.

In considering the geographic medium in its "regional sets" as the main problem of geography, the authors define a geographic region as a "natural-economic set" and proclaim the so-called "regional" trend in geography as a basic trend, asserting that this concept of geography issues from Lenin's works. However, in ascribing to Lenin a regional approach to the study of society, the authors have misunderstood his ideas.

The authors also assert that Stalin charged geographers with the task of studying the "intereffects which build up between a nation and a territory," when actually Stalin never spoke of any special "intereffect between a nation and a territory."

Furthermore, the authors credit the well-known geographer P. P. Semenov-Tyan-Shan'skiy with the separation of class groups of peasants in his work "Murayevenskaya Volost'." Actually, the credit belongs to Lenin. Although Lenin wrote that Semenov-Tyan-Shan'skiy's estimates "advantageously distinguish what characterizes the individual groups of peasants," these characteristics in no way constitute a class analysis. Such a work was not within the powers of P. P. Semenov.

One author's commentary on A. I. Vuyeykov's well-known quotation on the enormous importance of "studies of an income-expenditure book of solar heat" leaves a strange impression. The author of the article states that "it is interesting that Vuyeykov expounded the problem of the income and expenditure of solar heat without even attempting to discuss the heat balance, since he apparently understood that the balance of nature meant equilibrium, and equilibrium meant the background for development." It is an elementary fact that to study an income-expenditure book of solar heat is to compile a balance for this heat.

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Nor can we agree with the evaluation of Voyeykov's works on the geography of populations given in the same article. Though Voyeykov's works and discoveries in the field of climatology were epochal and a reincarnation of the ideas of the interconnection and interaction of elements of the geographic medium, his works in the field of the geography of populations contained a number of statements which conformed entirely to the official contemporary ideology and are thus unsuitable from the standpoint of Marxist methodology. The author should not, therefore, have concentrated on "the correct explanation" by Voyeykov of "the phenomena of economic geography taken separately," since Voyeykov's over-all approach to the geography of populations was incorrect. The article involuntarily creates the impression that Voyeykov's works on the geography of populations as a whole are correct and may be used today.

The reader will undoubtedly be left in confusion by the numerous commentaries of the authors on the quotations selected with bias from the works of Academician A. A. Grigor'yev. These commentaries are unfaithful and do not in any way correspond to the content or substance of Grigor'yev's works.

The assertion contained in Yu. Saushkin's article was not motivated by an analysis of the process of development and is not true in substance. Saushkin stated that the middle of the 18th century was a boundary line in history, "the dawn of capitalism" in Russia, a time when "the economic partition of the country was liquidated and a strong economic connection was established between the parts," when "the Russian people were finally consolidated into a nation," when "the creation of a Russian literary language was completed," etc.

Without going into any other faults of the symposium, we must state in conclusion that although symposium is dedicated to Academician D. N. Anuchin, he had an entirely different concept of geography and its problems than that ascribed to him by the authors. Anuchin always fought idealistic concepts in geography. He understood geography mainly as a science of the laws of development of the geographic medium as a whole. To Anuchin, the landscape was only a part of the geographic medium as a whole. The idea of self-development of the landscape, borrowed by the authors of the symposium from Korzhinskiy, was not included in his understanding of the landscape.

The important theoretical problem of formulating the fundamental principles of Soviet geographic science has been solved incorrectly by the authors of the symposium.

The authors' statement that the VASKhNIL session has not forced them to change anything in the articles bespeaks a superficial and uncritical attitude toward the viewpoints and purposes which they advanced.

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